A Particular and Exact Account of the Trial of Mary Compton, the Bloody and most Cruel Midwife of Poplar: As also of her Maid, Mary Compton the Younger; who were both Arraigned in one Indictment for Felony and Murder, in Destroying, Starving to Death, and Famishing several Poor Infant Babes: As also Ann Davis as Accessary. 21. Oct. 1693.

ON *Thursday* the first day of the Sessions, about Ten a Clock in the Morning, she was brought down to the Sessions-house upon a Porters Back, being very Lame in her Limbs, and was set to the Bar in a Chair, her Maid standing by her, *&c.* After which, silence being commanded, and the usual Proclamation being made, the Indictment was read, as followeth.

Clerk reads, *Mary Compton* the Elder, hold up your hand: *Mary Compton* the Younger, hold up your hand, [*which they did*]

You stand Indicted by the Names of Mary Compton *the Elder, Widow; and* Mary Compton *the Younger, Spinster, of the Parish of* Stepney, *in the County of* Middlesex, *for that you Two not having God before your Eyes, but being moved and seduced by the Devil, the* 28*th day of* February, *in the fifth year of the Reign of our Sovereign Lord and Lady, the King and Queen, at the Parish aforesaid, and County aforesaid; in and upon a Female Infant Child, under the Age of twelve Months, Feloniously, Wilfully, Maliciously, and Devilishly, you did make an Assault; and that you the said* Mary Compton *the Elder, afterwards between the said* 28*th day of* February, *and the* 20*th day of* August *last past, you did not allow to the said Female Infant, sufficient and wholesome Sustenance, and necessary Nourishment to sustain its Life, by reason of which the said Infant for want of Nourishment did languish, and lived languishing until the* 20*th day of* August, *on which* 20*th day of* August *the said Infant for want of due Sustenance, and wholsome Nourishment, did Perish and Dye.*

And that you the said Mary Compton *the Younger, was present, Abetting, Aiding, and Assisting to her the said* Mary Compton *the Elder, in this Felony and Murther committed by her the said* Mary Compton *the Elder, against the Peace of our Sovereign Lord and Lady, the King and Queen, their Crown and Dignity. How say you,* Mary Compton *the Elder, are you guilty of this Felony and Murder, whereof you stand indicted, or not guilty?*

Mary Compton the Elder, Not guilty.

Clerk, Mary Compton *the Younger; How say you, are you guilty as Accessary to the Felony and Murther committed by her the said* Mary Compton, *or not guilty?*

Mary Compton the Younger, Not guilty.

Clerk, *You stand a Second time likewise Indicted for the Murther of a Male Child in the like manner: are you guilty, or not guilty?*

Mary Compton the Elder, Not guilty.

Mary Compton the Younger. Not guilty.

Clerk, *You stand a Third time indicted by the same Names, for the Murder of* John Compton, *an Infant, in like manner;* viz. *in not allowing him necessary Sustenance and Nourishment: How say you, are you guilty of this Felony and Murder, or not guilty?*

Mary Compton the Elder, Not guilty.

Mary Compton the Younger, Not guilty.

Clerk, *You stand a Fourth time indicted for the Murther of one* Ann Compton, *an Infant, in like manner as the former. How say you, are you guilty of this Felony and Murther, or not guilty?*

Mary Compton the Elder, Not guilty.

Mary Compton the Younger, Not guilty.

Clerk, Culprit, How will you be tried?

Prisoners, By God and our Country.

Clerk, God send you a good Deliverance

On *Friday* Night about Six a Clock, the Prisoners were brought to the Bar a second time; and the Jury sworn to try the Cause, were these Gentlemen, whose Names follow;

William Dynn, Esq;	*John Green*,	*John Biscoe*,
Henry Russel,	*John Groves*,	*Robert Hopkins*,
Gilbert Herring,	*John Hall*,	*William Jennings*,
Nicholas Clark,	*Thomas Duncks*,	*Will Gunstone*, Gentlemen.

Then the King's Coroner for the County, called the Evidence for the King and Queen; which were the Church-Wardens, Overseers of the Poor, and others, the Inhabitants of *Poplar*, to the number of 12 or 15. who were all sworn; and the first that gave Evidence, was *Richard Drake*; but before he began, the Lord Chief Justice *Holt*, who tried the Cause, spake to the Midwife to mind what was said against her; ordering the Keeper of the Jayl to let her know (she being a little dull of hearing) that she was now upon her Life, and therefore it did concern her to hear the Evidence.

Then *Drake* deposed, That a little time before *Whitsuntide* last he was coming by the Midwifes Door in *Poplar* about Nine or Ten a Clock at Night, and hearing a great noise, he went into the House to see what was the matter; and when he came in, he found the Prisoner, *Mary Compton* the Elder, much disguised in Drink, and the Children crying about her for Bread. And he askt her, why she did not give them some Victuals? And he looking further into the House, to see if there were any Food, he could find nothing, neither Bread, Butter, Cheese, nor no manner of Sustenance whatever; and there was a little Infant in the Cradle, tearing, rending, and yawning its Mouth to and fro for lack of Nourishment; and a Neighbour hard-by that came in, gave it some Milk After this the Church-wardens and Overseers warned her out of the Town, for which they had no thanks from the Court, being told, That it was their Duty to have taken particular care of poor Children. About the 20th of *August* last, there was a Complaint made to the Minister of the Parish, by some of the Neighbours, that the Children wanted Sustenance, and he sent them some Relief, and 3 Children were put out from her; two of them could go about the House, and one lay in a Cradle, which died about 3 days after it was removed to another Nurse. The Nurse coming to the Midwifes house to tell a little Boy (aged about 7 years) that the Child was dead, and he must go to the burying: *Why*, says the Boy, *there is one Child, a Brother of mine, lies dead in the Cellar, take them, and bury them both together.* This raised a great Consternation, and mighty Jealousy in him and the rest; insomuch, that they made a diligent search in the Cellar, in every hole and Corner, and at last on a Shelf in an Hand-basket, there they found two Children dead with the Maggots crawling about them, to the great Terror and Amazement of all that beheld so dreadful a sight. So he askt the Maid, (she being in the House, but the old Woman was gone abroad) what Victuals she gave the Children; and she said, she had nothing but Cheese; What do you do for Drink: Why, I give it Water. What if you can't get it? Then, says she, we must go without it: And where is your Nurse? Why, she is gone to fetch us some Bread, but she never came at them. And the two Children that were found in the Hand-basket, were quite rotten, and almost a hatful of Maggots and Vermine came tumbling out of their Bellies, and it could not be discerned whether they were Male or Female, they had lain there so long, that they dropt to pieces when the Basket was first opened, and stunk so prodigiously, that no one was able to bear it. Then they dug in the same Cellar, and there they found the Bones and Skulls of another Child or two; there were two pieces of Skulls found, one of them was pretty dry, and the other was fresh, and the Brains lookt white, and streaks of Blood appeared in it, as if it had not been long buried. This was *Drake*'s Evidence.

Court, Old Woman, will you ask that man any questions?

Midwife, He is the greatest Rogue in *England*, a wicked Liar.

Then *Daniel Parnel* was produced, Overseer of the Poor of *Poplar*, who deposed, That he was present at the same time with *Drake*, and the rest: and what *Drake* had deposed, was matter of fact, and the very truth; and that he ordered one Mrs. *Greenwood* to look to the Children; and that the Old Woman had lived there about three years, and that he saw the Children that were found in the Hand-basket, and that the Maggots pour'd out at the Eyes of them, they were so rotten, which he said was a most dreadful sight to behold; Lord! what Woman would be so Bloody, so Monstrous, so Cruel, so much bereft of all Humanity, all natural Affections, worse than the Bruit Beasts that perish; the very Wild Beasts of Prey take care for their young Ones, and yet this wretched Creature had no mercy on those poor Innocent Babes. Oh! what manner of Account can she give to that offended and justly Incensed Judge, both of Heaven and Earth, the Lord *Jehovah*, before whose Judgment-Seat she must at length appear, to answer for the Bloodshed. Oh! that all Mothers and Nursing-people would be warned by such an unparallell'd Example as this, *&c.*

Mr *Parnell* went on, and declared, That he saw the pieces of Skulls likewise that were dug up in the Cellar, and one had hair upon it; and that when she heard the Children were found, she sent *Ann Davis* to pay the Rent for the House (which was 7 *l. per Annum*) and to get the Children away, but she came too late; and that she had reported that she had buried a Seaman's Wife's Child in the Cellar; and that he saw the three live Children in the House; and that they run up and down in Holes and Corners, and were in such a sad condition, that no mortal man never saw before; and one lay in the Cradle gaping for Food, and when it came to have some warm Sustenance, it died; it thrust the Lips on't out, and made what signs it could, but it could not speak; and it was past crying, it was so weak; and that it was about a quarter old when it dyed.

The next Witness was Mrs. *Greenwood*; who deposed, That she took the Child that was found in the Cradle, to nurse, the 18th of *August* last, from the Church-warden; and when she had it first, it was in a manner dead; and when she had it to her House, she first gave it some Milk, and then opened the Head of it, and the Head-cloaths were perished close to the Skull, and stuck in the Flesh; and the Ears of it were as it were rotten, and ready to drop off, and stunk most loathsomly for want of looking after; and the very Skin upon the Back, and the Lips and Breech of the poor Child came off with the Clouts; and there were perfect holes to be seen in the Hips of it; and that it was her Opinion, That it was perfectly starved to death; and that it died within three days after she had it.

The

The next was *George Huſt*; who declared upon Oath, That he was an Aſſiſtant to the Church-wardens, *&c.* at the ſearching the Cellar; and that the Door was bolted with three Bolts; and when it was opened, there came ſo noiſom a ſmell, that they were ſcarce able to go into the Cellar; and that he found the Basket firſt upon the ſhelf, and he took it down; and it was ſo heavy, that it had like to have fell out of his hand; he lookt into it, and it was covered with Rags, which he immediately uncovered; and in the Basket were two Corpſes of dead Children which lookt as black as his Hat, and the Vermin crawled out of their Bodies alive, almoſt a thouſand at a time, which made him ſo ſick, that he was forced to get ſome Drink.

Another Witneſs againſt her was Mr. *Flower*, a former Church-warden; who depoſed, That he was concerned with the reſt in this matter (being Overſeer); and that he found the Children in ſuch plight as hath been before ſpecified; and that after they had diſpoſed of the three Children, one to one Nurſe, and another to another, he lockt up the Door, and brought the Key to his Houſe; and that about a day or two afterwards, there came a Woman (one Mrs. *Davis*) to him, with a ſtrange Man, to tender the Rent of the Houſe; withal intending, as he ſuppoſed, to take the Children along with her: But when ſhe found how things went, ſhe went away, and cou'd not be heard of, *&c.* He alſo ſaw the two Children in the Hand-basket, and thoſe that were dug up.

Sarah Winn depoſed, That ſhe ſaw the Children in this lamentable and moſt pitiful eſtate; and the two dead Children in the Hand basket, and they were eaten up with Maggots; and that the Little Boy had told her there were divers Children miſſing before, and that he ſaw one carried out dead in a Hand-basket; but the Boy was too young to make an Evidence. Furthermore, ſhe declared, That the Child that was in the Cradle was perfectly periſhed, and become a perfect Anatomy; but ſhe ſaid it was a ſweet Skin'd Child, about a Quarter old; and ſhe did think in her Conſcience it was ſtarved to death.

One *Mary Edwards* declared, That ſhe was at the Houſe with the Children on a *Monday*, whilſt the Maid *Mary* was gone abroad, and there ſhe found nothing but Cheeſe; and ſhe took up the Child out of the Cradle, and Madam *Fynney*, a good Gentlewoman of *Pop'a.*, ſent ſome Milk for it; and ſhe took the Clouts and Headcloths from the Child, and it ſtuck faſt to the Fleſh, eat into it, and the Skin came off with it; and the Clothes dragged the Ears along with it: And alſo that ſhe had been kept by the Old Woman, when ſhe was young, and ſhe did remember that ſhe had been very unkind to her.

Joannah Smith depoſed, That ſhe ſaw the ſame ſight as the other had done in all its Circumſtances; particularly, that ſhe ſaw the Vermine craule out at the Mouths and Noſes of the Children, *&c.* And that the Church-wardens deſired her, whenever ſhe met Mrs *Compton*, or her Maid, to ſeize them. And about two or three days afterwards ſhe had the good fortune (as ſhe was going over the Water, to meet Madam *Compton*, and her Maid, in the *Strand*; and ſhe ſaid to her, how now, *Mall*, where are you awalking, and your Miſtreſs? a little way, ſays ſhe; Ay, but, ſays Mrs. *Smith*, you muſt go no farther; for the Children are ſtarved; and there are two found in a Hand-basket in the Cellar, and they are rotten; and therefore you muſt both go along with me: She denied that ſhe knew any thing of it, and was very troubleſome, and ſtrugled with Mrs. *Smith*, and would fain have got away from her; but ſhe had aſſiſtance, and ſo ſhe was, with her Maid, carried before a Magiſtrate, and committed to *Newgate*, having been about ſix weeks gone from her Children.

This was the ſum and ſubſtance for the King and Queen. Next of all, the Church-wardens of St. *Lawrence-Jury*, St. *Mary Cree-Church*, and St. *Mary-le-Bow*, &c. were called, who gave account what Children they had put to nurſing to her; *viz.* St. *Lawrence-Jury* and St *Mary Magdalen Milkſtreet*, being united Pariſhes, 5. *Cree-Church* 3. St. *Mary-le-Bow*, 3.

Theſe were all ſet to her lately, and they gave her 5 *l.* a Child, and 3 *l.* a Child with them to take them wholly off of the Pariſh; and no account could be given what became of thoſe Children ſo placed out to nurſe to her; which matter was very ill reſented by the Court. For all the Ends and Deſigns of Church-wardens and Overſeers now-adays was to ſecure their Pariſhes, and had but little reſpect to the Life and well-being of the Infants. Yea, the Court did not ſpare to tell them who are Maſters of Pariſhes; That by ſuch Indiſcreet Actions as theſe, they made themſelves Acceſſaries to the Murther of ſuch poor Children, in ſelling their Lives (as it were) for 5 *l.* and 3 *l.* a Child.

Then the Court ſpake to the Old woman thus: *Mary Compton*, You are charged with the Murther of ſeveral Children, by ſtarving of them to death. You did take young Children from Pariſhes to breed up, and you did not do it as you ought to have done; there were ſome found buried in a Cellar, others in a Hand-basket; and there was one in a Cradle, in ſuch a condition, that the very Skin came off of its Head, the Ears rotted off; ſo that it did not die of any Sickneſs, but it was really rotten, and that was for want of Suſtenance: They gave it Suſtenance, and it took it eagerly, and this was a ſign that it was ſtarved to death: There were two Children found upon the Shelf, and the very Vermine crawled about them; why did not you bury them at the uſual place? why did you conceal them? there was two pieces of Skulls found in the Cellar; one ſeemed to be freſh, and had the Brains; the other was putrified.

Midwife. My Lord, I did not bury them there.

Court. Why did not you give account what became of thoſe Children? why did you go away, and leave your Houſe?

Midwife. Why, becauſe I was forced to it, for fear of being arreſted; I durſt not come at my Houſe; I was arreſted but a little before, and the Children were taken with a Looſeneſs and Vomiting. And becauſe I was not at home, my Maid could not bury them. This Man, *Drake*, is a great Rogue: Then ſhe called for Witneſſes..

Robert Soaper, *Mary Shepley*, *Eliz. Cook*, *Mary Scutts*, *Katherine Cook*, and her Daughter.

Who all declared upon Oath, That they had known her for ſeveral years; and formerly ſhe behaved her ſelf fairly; but as for this matter in hand, they were all ſtrangers to it, *&c.*

Midwife, My Lord, my Children never wanted for any thing, tho I was not at home.

Mr. *Drake*, My Lord, ſhe has a Husband living now, his name is *Nicholas Compton*, he was alive about a month ago.

Midwife, My Lord, he tells a damn'd Lye. My Children never wanted for any thing; I have brought up a great many that are men and women now, and I never uſed any of them amiſs in my life. My Lord, this Fellow, *Drake*, has Arreſted me in an Action of 40 *l.* at the ſuit of one *Stone*, and I was fain to keep abroad.

Court, Prove that any body occaſioned you to be abſent from your houſe.

Midwife, May it pleaſe you, my Lord, they did do it, and they would have done it again.

Drake, I never Arreſted her in my life; but I told her there was an Action would come out againſt her, that was all.

Midwife, You are a Lying Rogue.

Then the Court mildly reproved her, and caution'd her to be better adviſed, and to give better language, foraſmuch as ſuch a Carriage did not become a perſon under ſuch Circumſtances as hers; therefore it would be beſt for her to make the beſt Defence ſhe could; and asked her if ſhe had any more to ſay? She anſwered, No, my Lord.

Then the Maid was asked, What ſhe had to ſay? She anſwered, That her Miſtreſs when ſhe went away left her no money, and ſaid ſhe would be at home at night; and ſhe went away by reaſon the Baker threatned to Arreſt her for 3 *l.* for Bread, and was gone away 6 weeks; and ſhe for her part did not know any thing how the Children came into the Cellar; and there was no Proof againſt her.

Having done on all ſides, the Court ſumm'd up the Evidence very diſtinctly to the Gentlemen of the Jury, putting them in mind what a weighty Caſe lay before them, deſiring them to be careful, and to conſider what a moſt Horrid Fact the Priſoner ſtood charged with, and to bring in a Verdict according to their Conſciences, *&c.*

So they withdrew for about half an hour, and brought in this Verdict, *That* Mary Compton *the Elder, was Guilty of Wilful Murther, upon all four Indictments; But the* Maid *was acquitted.*

Ann Davis, Wife of **Henry Davis**, was tried for that ſhe knowing *Mary Compton*, the Midwife, to have committed the Murther upon the four Infants (as appears herein) ſhe did harbour, comfort, and maintain her. And the method of doing it, was thus; She came to *Poplar* (after the Midwife was taken) and offered the Rent of the Midwife's Houſe, which was unpaid, being 3 *l.* 10 *s.* as alſo to take away the Children, and being not accepted, ſhe went back to Mrs. *Compton* to *Newington-Cawſey*, where ſhe was, and told her of it. And ſhe ſaid to her Maid, *Ah!* Mall, *you have undone me.* And further it was ſworn, That ſhe did adviſe Mrs. *Compton* to get the two Children out of the Cellar, and bury them from her Houſe; this was proved by the King's Coroner. She ſaid upon her defence, That ſhe was only to pay the Rent, and then to bring the live Children away, and not the dead. It was ſwore alſo, That ſhe buried one Child of her own privately, not long ſince. It plainly appeared upon the whole matter, that ſhe was Acceſſary to the old Midwife, and was an ill Woman. In the end ſhe was found guilty, and burnt in the Hand.

MR. Recorder *declared in open Court this Seſſion, That he finding that great and intolerable Trouble, and many unjuſt Suſpicions and Reflections did ariſe by reaſon of the preſent Method of Reporting Convicts and their Crimes to Their Majeſties after every Gaol Delivery of* Newgate. *Therefore deſired, That for the future at every Seſſions the Court would be pleaſed to conſider the Convicts and their Crimes, and who were fit for Mercy; the which that Court did well approve of: And did further declare, That he would not vary from the ſame in any reſpect whatever, in his Report to Their Majeſties; and deſired that no Application might be made to him to the contrary.*

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